

Chapter I

HISTORY

CHAPTER I - HISTORY

HISTORY OF CORRIDOR

The character of the Rockville Pike Corridor (Maryland 355) along its 1.5 mile stretch from Twinbrook Parkway to Maryland 28 reflects its longstanding position in the region as a retail marketplace and major arterial highway serving the county. The Pike has been known at various times as "The Georgetown to Rockville Turnpike," "The Washington National Road," "The Great Road," "The Georgetown to Frederick Road," and "The Turnpike." It is Montgomery County's oldest road and believed to have existed in one form or another for over 300 years.

In its earliest form, the road was an Indian Trail leading from the hunting grounds and trading areas of the mountain to the Potomac River. As settlers came, the county developed and tobacco became the legal tender. The road changed from an Indian trail to one upon which "hogsheads" of tobacco were rolled to the waiting ships for transit to European markets. Such a "rolling road" is known to have existed before 1750. Rockville Pike contributed to the opening of the western territories and commercial expansion during the early 1780's.

Nineteenth Century

In the 1812 War, government officials escaped the British attack on Washington by way of Rockville Pike. By 1840, many people used the Pike to emigrate from the county to developing areas farther north and west.

After the Civil War, the Reconstruction years brought new emphasis to transportation in Rockville. The Metropolitan Branch of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad through Rockville was completed in 1873. The Metropolitan Branch was a major competitor for travel on the old worn Rockville Turnpike. The road quickly fell into disrepair and by 1898, it had become known as one of the worst pieces of highway in the state. "On the Rockville Turnpike, the wagon traffic was found to have cut its own dirt trail along the roadside -- a track so worn by years of use that it had sunk 12 feet below the surface of the rough stone road."¹ In 1898, state law obliged the county commissioners to rebuild the Old Georgetown Road to Rockville Turnpike.²

¹ Grateful Remembrance, p. 237

² Ibid p. 237

Post World War I to World War II

Once development of the modern highway system commenced and the use of the automobile became popular, an improved means of traveling between the Washington and rural farm markets became available. This stimulated a revitalization of the basic agricultural economy and a rise in land values along paved roads. Up until 1930, the Pike Corridor was basically agricultural; thereafter, it became more suburban and residential in character.



Lewis Reed Photograph, Courtesy of Charles Brewer

Post World War II Period

Development during the post World War II period played the most significant part in shaping the Pike as we know it today. Federal financing programs encouraging home ownership spurred a suburban housing boom.

Shopping centers to serve the new residential development were built along Rockville Pike and Veirs Mill Road. In 1953, Rockville Pike was widened to four lanes, and soon thereafter the Washington National Pike (now I-270) was completed.

In 1959, the new Congressional Shopping Center was completed on the site of the Congressional Airport. At the time, Congressional Center was one of the largest of the new suburban shopping centers in the Washington area. In 1958, the Pike in front of Congressional carried 16,650 vehicles per day, which was the second highest volume of traffic on a suburban road at the time.

In 1975, Rockville Pike was widened to six lanes and development continued to be oriented toward automotive, service and retail activities. Between 1975 and 1986, approximately 1.8 million gross square feet of new development took place. Of this amount, 48% was devoted to retail and hotels, and 52% to office development.

Metrorail Period

In December 1984, the White Flint, Twinbrook, Rockville and Shady Grove Metro Stations began service that links the Pike to the greater Washington community via rapid rail mass transit. The coming of Metrorail service stimulated a change in the type of development on the pike from auto-oriented, strip retail centers to freestanding office buildings and large-scale, mixed-use development.

At present, Rockville Pike is one of the busiest and most productive retail-commercial corridors in the Metropolitan Washington region. In 1982, the Pike ranked third among the region's retail sales areas.



In 1985, the City Planning Department conducted a survey of 587 shoppers within the study area. The purpose of the survey was to determine the characteristics of the shoppers, their buying habits, and their opinions on the quality of Rockville pike as a shopping environment, as well as to get ideas for suggested improvements.

A parallel survey of 40 merchants was conducted to obtain information on retail rental trends, operating expenses, expansion and relocation plans. The survey also solicited opinion from the merchants about Rockville Pike as a retail environment.

Both surveys suggested that the largest proportion of shoppers using the Pike are Rockville residents, followed by residents from the Potomac and north Bethesda areas of the county. Destination retailers such as furniture showrooms and specialty clothing stores attract shoppers from Washington, D.C.; northern Virginia; Columbia, Laurel and Frederick, Maryland.

Rockville Pike is regarded as a strong retail environment due to its accessibility and broad range of stores. Traffic congestion, unattractive appearance of stores and lack of convenient parking were cited as problems that detract from the quality of the retailing environment. These problems may be traced to its birth as a commercial strip.

RECENT PLANNING HISTORY

The Rockville Pike Corridor (Planning Area 9 and part of 1) includes 258 acres and is strategically situated on the central spine of the City. The study area is bounded by MD 28 on the north, the Metrorail/railroad tracks on the east, the City boundary on the south. Fleet Street, Ritchie Parkway, Woodmont Country Club and East Jefferson Street form the Pike's western border.

During the 1950's, parts of the Pike area were zoned for commercial and industrial uses. The 1960 Master Plan designated the entire length of the Pike for general commercial and industrial uses; these recommendations were reiterated in the 1970 revision of the Master Plan.

Economics of Amenities Committee

In 1982, the Mayor and Council in cooperation with Partners for Livable Places (a private, nonprofit association of artists, planners, designers and professionals dedicated to the furtherance of the livability of urban places), established the Economics of Amenities Committee. Representing both the residential and business communities, the committee set about the task of examining the function and appearance of the Pike within the City. This Committee worked for two years and concluded its efforts with the completion of a Recommended Rockville Pike Streetscape Plan. This

document suggested concepts for both public and private participation in upgrading the Pike's image by establishing a clear identity for the Corridor.

Recommendations of the Streetscape Plan included consistent use and placement of street trees along the roadway edge; undergrounding of utilities; consolidation of driveways along the Pike; relocation of the sidewalk from the edge of the road to a safer interior position; consistency in implementing the service drive concept; establishment of gateways at Twinbrook Parkway and the Town Center; consistent intersection and median treatments; and placing of new signage to aid shopper orientation. The committee also recommended that the Planning Commission develop a comprehensive land use and urban design plan for the Corridor.

Rockville Pike Advisory Committee

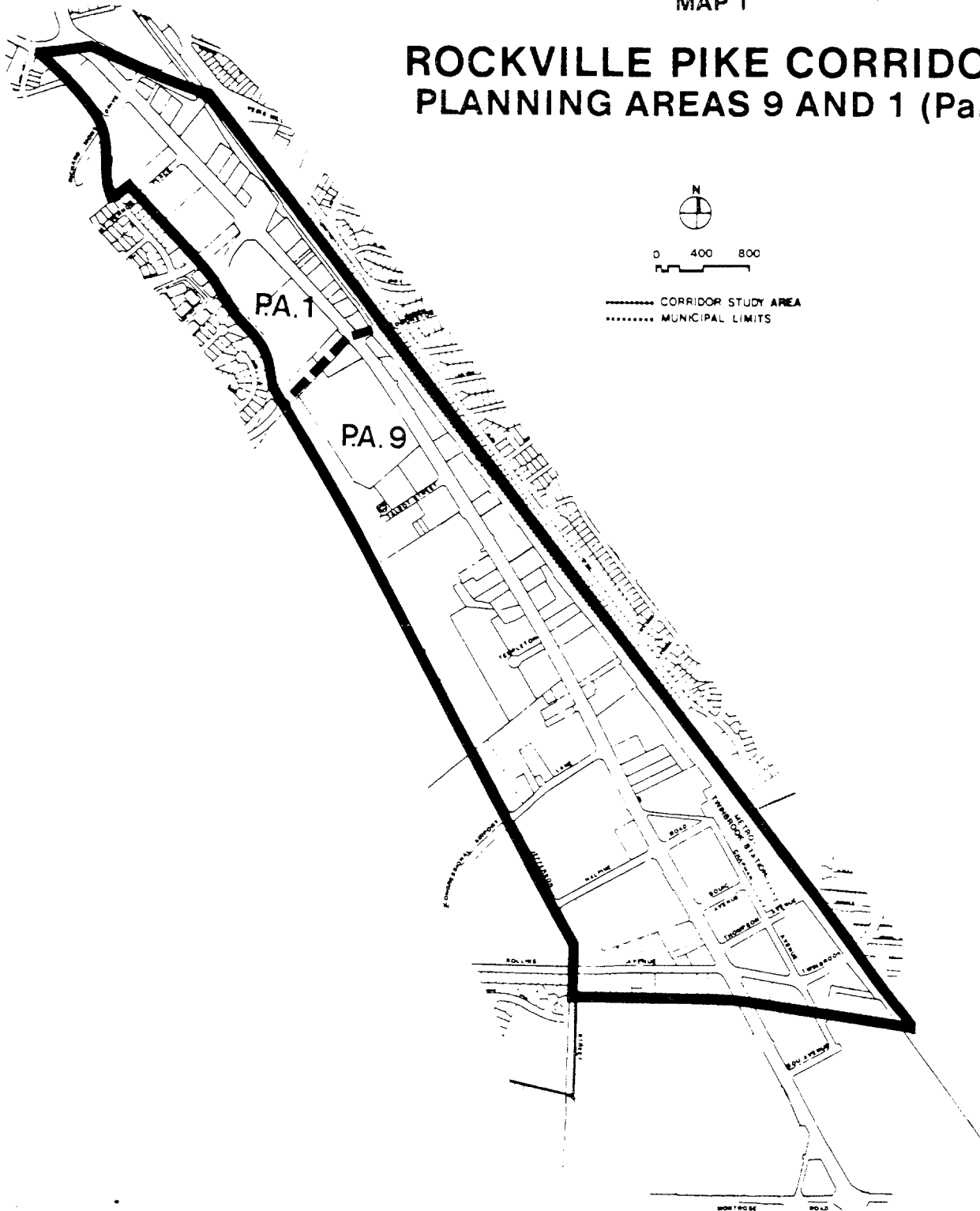
In 1984, the Planning Commission appointed the Rockville Pike Advisory Committee (RPAC) to continue the work begun by the Economics of Amenities Committee. This 18-member committee was composed of representatives from civic associations, the community at large, tenants, individuals and property owners. Four of the original Economics of Amenities Committee members also served on the RPAC.

On June 25, 1984, in an effort to temporarily reduce pressures for intense office development along the Pike, the Mayor and Council imposed a moratorium on the acceptance and processing of new use permits for properties on the Pike within the City. At the same time, the City retained a transportation planning and engineering firm (JHK and Associates) to work with the RPAC and the Planning Commission to develop interim solutions and recommendations for the future of the Pike.

With the issuance of the moratorium order, the RPAC shifted its attention from the Plan to the immediate problem of addressing the current capacity along the Pike. On February 6, 1985, the committee presented a series of recommendations to the Mayor and Council to encourage them to lift the development moratorium. These recommendations included a reduction in the floor area (FAR) in the C-2 zoned areas along the corridor from 3.0 to 2.0, and the creation of an optional method of development that would provide performance standards for increased density above 2.0 FAR in mixed-use projects. The RPAC also recommended development of a comprehensive plan for the corridor that would focus on urban design and transportation systems management (TSM) strategies.

MAP 1

ROCKVILLE PIKE CORRIDOR PLANNING AREAS 9 AND 1 (Part)



On April 2, 1985, the moratorium on the receipt and processing of use permits was lifted and the FAR on the C-2 zoned parts of the Pike was reduced to 2.0 from its previous maximum of 3.0. The Mayor and Council agreed not to reinstate a development moratorium during the study period if the development community agreed to continue participation in the planning process as "stakeholders," and practice restraint in promoting additional development activity. At this time, the Rockville Pike Business Association was established to formally represent the interests of business and development communities during the continuing planning process.

The majority of the RPAC favored a land use plan that would equally distribute density along the corridor and include a new zone incorporating an optional method of development. The Committee recommended a base zone of .5 FAR with bonuses to allow development levels up to 2.5 FAR. It was forecasted by the Committee that approximately 7.1 million gross square feet of development could be built in the corridor using an optional method of development with an equal distribution of density without overloading the area's traffic capacity if all roadway improvements were made.

Transportation, pedestrian circulation and landscaping issues were also addressed in the RPAC report. The report recommended additions to the street system to maximize local circulation and access to commercial properties while decreasing intersection congestion.

Planning Commission's Approved Plan

In January 1987, the Planning Department issued a preliminary draft plan based on the recommendations of the RPAC. This Plan was reviewed by the Planning Commission and extensively modified by the planning staff at the direction of the Commission, and a revised plan was issued as The Recommended Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan in April 1987. Public hearings were held as required by state law and followed by public worksessions to insure full citizen participation. The Approved Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan recommended a maximum FAR of 2.25 using an optional method of development. Another recommendation was the northward extension of Jefferson Street to Ritchie Parkway to serve as a parallel route for Rockville Pike. The development of the Plan relied on extensive public comment and was presented to the Mayor and Council in October 1987 for review and adoption.

Mayor and Council's Recommended Plan

The Mayor and Council's Recommended Plan evolved from the Planning Commission's Approved Plan. The Mayor and Council held a public hearing in December 1987 to elicit public comment on the Planning Commission's Approved Plan. Following this, the Mayor and Council held a number of

worksessions and instructed staff to modify the Commission's Plan. The staff, with the aid of a team of consultants, was also instructed to review the Mayor and Council's recommendation for consistency and appropriateness. As a result, the Mayor and Council revised their recommendations, including a new and detailed approach to the Twinbrook Metro Area. Development of the Twinbrook Metro Area element of the Plan represents a new and detailed approach to that area. On December 12, 1988, the Mayor and Council held a public hearing on the Plan, Map and Text Amendments. In response to concerns raised at this hearing, the Plan, Map and Text Amendments were put in their present final form.

FUTURE EFFORTS - IMPLEMENTATION

A variety of land use management techniques are currently available in the City's administrative and regulatory structure which can be used to implement the Plan. These include subdivision regulations, building and housing codes, landscaping requirements, urban design criteria, public space requirements, demolition controls, and various inspection and licenses procedures.

The City will develop an implementation strategy after adoption of the Plan. The implementation strategy will also include the identification of public works projects to be included in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP). The implementation strategy is critical to the success of the Plan so that day-to-day public and private sector activities are consistent and coordinated with Plan objectives and policies. A report on the implementation process will be prepared periodically and the results of Plan implementation will be continuously reviewed and formally amended every five years.